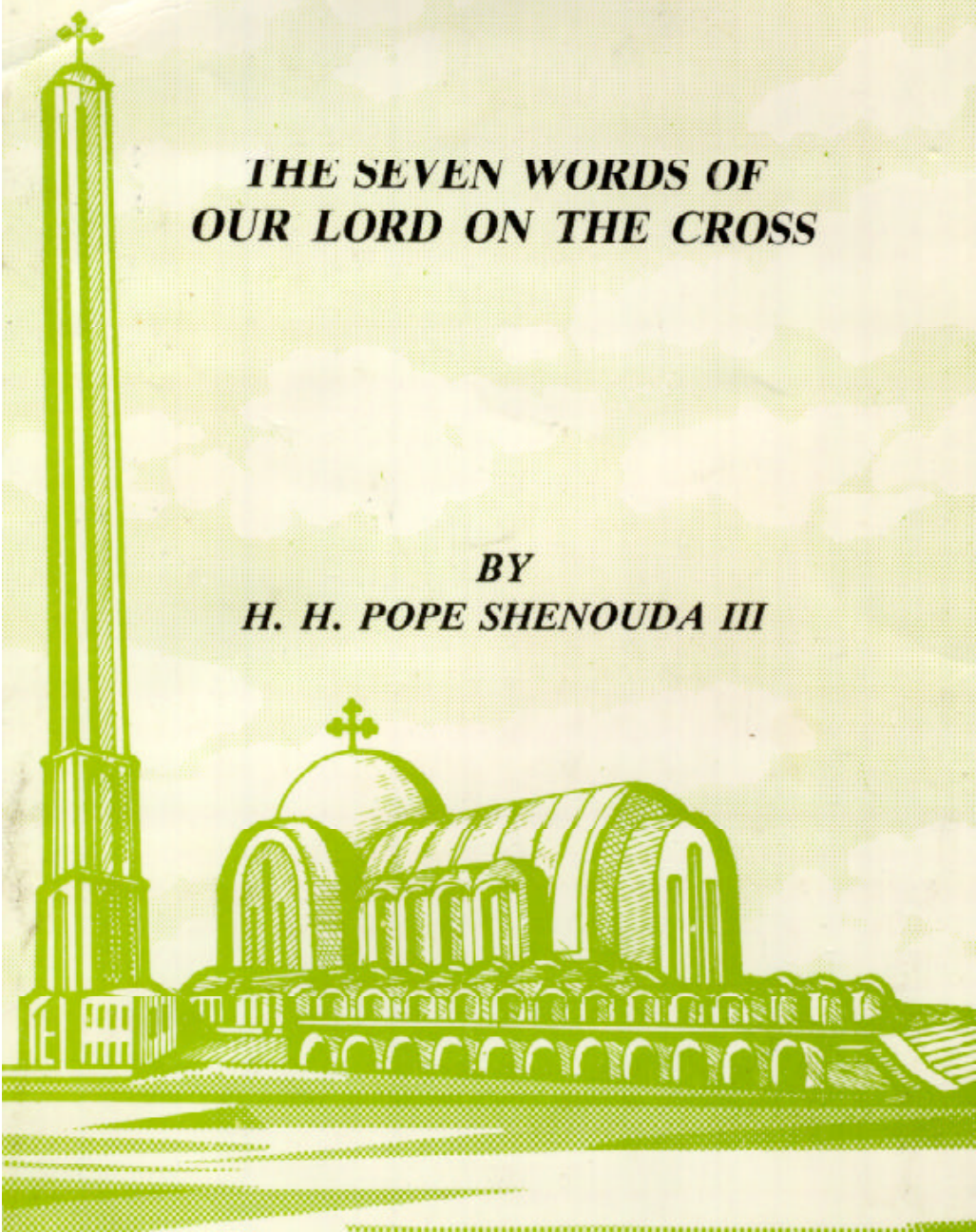


**THE SEVEN WORDS OF
OUR LORD ON THE CROSS**

**BY
H. H. POPE SHENOUDA III**





**COPTIC ORTHODOX
PATRIARCHATE**



See of St. Mark

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*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of
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INTRODUCTION

Seven pronouncements were made by Our Lord in His passion on the Cross. They were a lifeblood for us all.

At very few instances did He talk during His trial or while being tortured and reviled. He forfeited His own right, and conceded His self-respect. *"Love does not seek its own"* (1 Cor. 13:5).

But while on the Cross, He spoke out, when it behooved Him to speak. He spoke out for our sake, our benefit and salvation. Each word had its own impact. We are going to discuss these points in depth later on, but for now we have these comments to make regarding His pronouncements in general:

We recognise in Christ's words on the Cross the property of giving.. we are apt to wonder that while He was on the Cross, in a state of batteredness and submission, He was a giver..He gave forgiveness to His persecutors, gave Paradise to the thief on His right side, gave His Blessed Mother a spiritual Son and provided her with care and attention. He gave beloved John the blessedness of accommodating Mary in his house, and gave the Father the price of the Divine Justice as ordained, He gave humanity atonement and redemption, and gave us also security that the act of salvation has been accomplished. In short, He has given everybody his due while no one gave Him anything. He offered all that to humanity though humanity offered Him nothing in return except gall and vinegar...

The first and last of Christ's seven pronouncements were addressed to the Father: His First Statement was addressed to the Father: *"Father, forgive them"*(Luke 23: 34).

His Last Statement was addressed to the Father: *"Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit"* (Luke. 23: 46).

And between the First and the Last, two other statements were also addressed to the Father: *"My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Matt. 27:46) The other: *"It is finished "* (John 19:30) Though this Last pronouncement could be only a general statement, it is still a message to the Father: *"I have finished the work which You have given Me to do"* (John 17:4) Thus the greater part or about half of Christ's words were addressed to the Father. They were also words of assurance to humanity.

We, also, note that He addressed the Father in two ways: *"Father"* and *"My God "*. By the word *"Father"* He contested those who challenged Him, saying: *"If You are the Son of God, come down from the Cross."* (Matt. 27. 40) He offered evidence that He is the Son of God.

However, He did not descend from the Cross, but made the Cross ascend to Heaven!

By the word *"Father"* He established His divinity and by that of *"God"* He established His humanity. By both words He declared His being the incarnated God, who *"Was manifested in the flesh "*. (1 Tim. 3:16). By the word *"Father"*

He refuted the heresy of Arius in the fourth century who denied Christ's divine nature and by the term "My God", He refuted the heresy of Eutyches in the fifth century who denied Christ's human nature. By the first He was speaking as the Son of God; by the second as the Son of Man, or the representative of humanity...

On the Cross He did not only address the Father but He also addressed humanity... the saints exemplified by the holy Virgin and John the Apostle, and also the penitent sinners represented by the thief on His right side.

His were words of blessedness and grace. It was a moment of salvation, worthy of all bliss... Thus, He spoke the words of forgiveness, redemption and everlasting life. He spoke the words of endowment and grace. On the Cross He did not condemn anybody, He did not punish a single person, in spite of all His afflictions: He did not come to destroy but to save the world.

Christ's words on the Cross follow a certain order, the wisdom of which cannot be mistaken... Others first,

Himself, second. His being is for the benefit of others. He started by asking forgiveness for humanity, for His holy blood commenced to have its impact as an instrument of redemption while on the Cross, and with the advent of redemption came the second word proclaiming the opening of Paradise. For as the price of redemption has been paid off by blood, accessibility to Paradise must take effect...

We also notice that the Lord Jesus Christ mentioned His enemies before He mentioned His friends. His first words referred to His persecutors, the malefactor, then to Virgin Mary and St. John...

When He spoke with God the Father He first addressed Him as the Father, then as God.. First, as *"The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father"* (John 1:18); Second, as the Son of Man born since the fullness of time..

His first Three Words pertained to the act of forgiveness and providence, while His last four words came as a declaration that the act of redemption was fulfilled.

His words, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* denote that the Father has forsaken Him in order for Him to pay the price of redemption and also point to His emotional agony in sustaining God's wrath for the transgressions of man.

His words, *"I thirst"* (John 19:28) point to the physical torment that He sustained for humanity's sake. Both pronouncements mean that He was paying the price. The words, *"It is finished"* is an implicit assurance to man that the price has been paid off. The clause saying, *"Into Your hands I commend My spirit"* signifies that death is the wages of sin, and through death redemption was accomplished... Thus, the last four phrases were an assurance to humanity concerning redemption...

There is also a cry of joy and triumph in the last two phrases... As God has declared His agony by which redemption

was accomplished, He announced His joy for the accomplishment of redemption.

The phrase, "*It is finished*" (*John 19:30*) signifies that everything conducive to final redemption has been fulfilled. God found joy in accomplishment of the act He planned, and did not allow anything to hinder it. This also applies to His pronouncement, "*Into Your hands I commend My spirit.*" (*Luke 23:46*) With these two last statements He declared the defeat of the devil. The battle was over; by death, God put an end to the power of death... and there came the cry of triumph and joy.

The foregoing statements amply teach us that the Lord Jesus Christ, while on the Cross, was working for us... Not only was He achieving our redemption, but He was continuing His role as a benefactor and teacher. He kept on making important revelations concerning salvation...

In His first words He demonstrated practically how to tolerate, forgive and love our enemies...

In His last words, "*Into Your hands I commend My spirit*" (*Luke 23:46*) He revealed to us that the soul is immortal, that the righteous spirit ascends to God after death.

In His Third Statement, He taught us about true love and care, and He taught us how to execute truly and practically the fifth commandment by honouring His mother...

How many are the insights and observations that we can deduce from these seven pronouncements. How significant

is the number seven, too. Let us delve into each and every one of them trying to grasp their meaning fully.



The First Word

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do ".
(*Luke 23:34*).

Our benevolent Lord Jesus Christ, in His deepest agony on the Cross, was not thinking about Himself, but was preoccupied by the interests of others. He was not thinking about His sufferings, His pain, His exhaustion or His wounds. He paid no heed to the painful gashes of the scourges on His back; he paid no heed to nails piercing His hands and feet, nor to the crown of thorns that pierced His head, neither did He care about His battered and exhausted body.. All that He ignored because His sole concern was His love for mankind. The first thought to cross His mind was to save His adversaries and persecutors... Thus, His First Words on the Cross were: *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"* (*Luke 23:34*).

The Lord cared for His enemies first before He cared for His friends or Himself.. He offered forgiveness to His persecutors first, then forgave the malefactor who reviled Him at the beginning, but believed in Him later. Then, He directed His attention to His mother. After all that, He began to speak about Himself:

"Father, forgive them....",(*Luke 23:34*) words He pronounced while undergoing the utmost physical pain... Truly, He was at the peak of torment and affliction at the hands of those for whom He was asking forgiveness! But His love for them was

greater than their hostility towards Him; their hostility that was indescribably atrocious and wicked...

In spite of all that, He did not only pray that they might be forgiven but He gave them an excuse! Those , who would not have dared to even think about exonerating themselves; those who cried out loudly: *"His blood be on us and on our children "* (Matt. 27: 25). The One who was scourged and crucified by them was the one to excuse them. He said: *"For they do not know what they do"*(Luke 23:34). How wonderful is the Lord in His exhaustive love. He did not hasten to condemn them; He did not seek revenge, or even take to resignation and negatives. His love for them was positive; He sought forgiveness for them. He exonerated them; He defended their cause in the presence of the heavenly Father, declaring that their sin was only one of ignorance...

But, in our judgement as human beings, we consider them perpetrators of a chain of atrocious criminal acts. Among the ranks of the religious authorities or priesthood, there was covetousness, jealousy, enmity, slander and double-crossing. On the part of the ungrateful public, there were accounts of reckless wrongful rejection. As for the military and the priests' servants, they committed atrocities, calamities, cursing and assaults. Pontius Pilate showed cowardice, injustice and indifference. Above all, it was a crime of homicide, torture and fabricating false evidence. But the condemned in His loving-kindness did only consider it an offence committed in ignorance, *"For they do not know what they do.. "*!(Luke 23:34) How wonderful is the loving-kindness of the crucified Lord .. the immenseness of His kindness is hard to grasp...

The Lord Christ in His forgiveness for His persecutors has put into practice, beyond doubt, one of His teachings.

He has said before: "*Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,*" (Matt. 5:44) In this case He was performing exactly that what He had previously commanded humanity to do. The Lord did not give to others Commandments that He did not observe. He put into practice His teaching: "*Love your enemies'* ;(Matt 5:44); and He accomplished that with such a wonderful idealism and faithfulness. He forgave His persecutors and offenders...

Blessed Brethren, what do you think of this verse: "*Father, forgive them* "? If you recall these words on the Good Friday or at any time and say: "I will also do as you did my Lord for all those who harassed and hated me, who persecuted and mistreated me. I ask You to forgive them for they do not know what they do". In this way, you partake with Christ His work of benevolence and love.

What good is it for you if Christ has forgiven His enemies while you still hate your own or do not pardon them? What benefit do you gain? In other words, you take no part with Christ in His benevolence; you do not partake in His work and you do not follow His path...

Know then that Christ forgave us, so that we may forgive others, and enjoy the bliss of forgiveness.. as it is rendered unto us, and rendered by us.

Whenever, we remember the offences of others, we should also say truly and faithfully: *"Forgive them, for they do not know what they do "*.(Luke 23:34) However, when we say so, we are actually in a different position than that of the Lord Jesus Christ. What He says is:

“Father, forgive them, for I have paid off the wages of their sin, and they stand in no debt. I have satisfied the divine justice; I repaid all their debts, now forgive them. Here I am dying on behalf of those who crucified Me and on behalf of those who loved Me. When I say, *"Forgive them "*. I do not mean only those, but all those who seek refuge in My blood: All penitent sinners from the day of Adam to eternity. Forgive them, as *"For this purpose I came to this hour"* (John 12:27).

One of those to whom this verse did apply, *"For they do not know what they do"* was **St. Longinus, the soldier who pierced Christ with a spear...** Our Church commemorates him on two days: on the 23rd of the Coptic month Abib and the 5th of the month Hatoor... He pierced Christ with a spear, not knowing what he was doing. Thus, the Lord forgave him, and also, converted him. St. Longinus believed and preached in Cappadocia and gained the crown of martyrdom at the hands of Caesar Tiberius. The Lord revealed his blessedness through many miracles that took place following his death.

The verse: *"For they do not know what they do' ;(Luke 23:34)* also applies to another Saint. He was a wild beast who fought the Christians fiercely, tormented and killed them... He was the right hand to Emperor Diocletian who

helped him greatly in torturing the Christians. He was incomparably fierce and awful...

To him was dispatched any Christian whom the Roman magistrates would fail to torture fully. There he would be subjected to new ingenious unmerciful torture techniques.

This man was St. Arianus the magistrate of the city of Ansenia (Now called El Sheik Ubada, in the Province of Mallawi, El Menia, Egypt). He put to death many thousands of Christians, with the utmost atrocity and ferocity. Knowing not what he was doing, he continued in his persecutions until he believed in Christ and died a martyr on the 8th of the Coptic month Baramhat at the hands of the Roman Emperor Diocletian. His name was recorded in the Church's Chronicle (Sanexsarium), and the Church came to commemorate him as one of its great saintly fathers...

Saul of Tarsus was, also, one of those, "Who knew not what they do"... He made havoc of the church, entering into every house and having men and women committed to prison (Acts 8:3). He took part in the persecution of St. Stephen the archdeacon and the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:58), he was a monstrous and dreadful person... However, he did not know what he was doing until the Lord revealed Himself to him on the road to Damascus and found him a Chosen Vessel. So, Saul believed and was baptised; he became Paul the Apostle who preached the name of Christ. He suffered more than any other Apostle, was persecuted and tormented severely and died as a martyr at the hands of Emperor Nero. He became one of the great pillars of Christianity and one of its illuminated high towers... What would have become of St. Paul, if the Lord

Jesus Christ had not kindly said: *"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do."*

"Father, forgive them... " I do not wish to take revenge; I do not want to return evil for evil. Some of them crucified me, yet, "I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to Myself: that where I am, there you may be also. " (John 14:3).

"Father, Forgive them ", when He said this, He did not mean to forgive all His persecutors without exception. For nobody could be endowed with forgiveness unless he fulfils two essential conditions: Faith and Penitence. Without Faith and Penitence nobody can attain salvation or forgiveness.

Father, forgive those who do believe and repent.

The Scripture says: *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His Only Begotten Son "... He loved the whole world and gave His Son for the whole world.. but did the whole world attain salvation? .No, only those who believe in him as the rest of the verse says, "That whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life". (John 3:16). This concerns the requirement of faith; as for the requirement of penitence, the Lord says: "I tell you, No; but, unless you repent you will all likewise perish ". (Luke 13:3).*

Thus, this demand, "Forgive them", would not apply to the Jews at the present time, as they still believe in Judaism and are persistent in their denial of the Lord Jesus Christ and the virginity of the Blessed Virgin. They still maintain that Jesus Christ, who was born in Nazareth in 1979 was a deviant and

made others go astray. So, their forefathers deservedly condemned him to death. Thus their acquiescence to what their ancestors did make them partakers in the same crime and they will have to stand trial.

But, if they do repent and believe and become Christians, the Lord will forgive them and they would not be called Jews any longer.

The Lord Jesus Christ brought salvation to the whole world, but none will enjoy this salvation except the penitent and the believers who follow His paths, led by the Holy Spirit working in His sacraments.

Father, forgive those penitent believers. To those who persistently and blindly deny, The Lord Jesus Christ said "And where I am, you cannot come" (John 7:34). Again, He told them: *"And you will seek Me, and will die in your sins.. For if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins. " (John 8:21, 24)* Three times in the Eighth chapter of the gospel of St. John the Lord Jesus Christ tells them, *"For if you believe not that I am He, you shall die in your sins "*.

As for those in whom He has even the slightest hope, and in as many times as they maltreat, persecute and spurn Him, He will still lovingly reiterate His kind supplication to the Father: *"Forgive them for they do not know what they do "*.

The Samaritans are among those who refused to receive Him and denied Him admission to their country. His disciples James and John were zealous and asked Him to command a fire to come down from Heaven, and consume

them. But He rebuked His disciples, saying: *"You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them "* (Luke 9: 52-56). This was what He told His disciples, but undoubtedly, to God He said: *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do. "* Thus He treated them with patience and tolerance until they came to know, love and believe in Him, *"Now we believe, not because of what you said: for we ourselves have heard Him, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the World. "* (John 4:42).

"Father, forgive them. " **These words embody the ultimate love and the ultimate forgiveness.** In order to grasp their full significance, apply them to your situation...

You may forgive a person who just gave you a difficult time. But imagine a person that would charge you falsely, convict you unjustly, instigate both the people and the authorities against you, mock and insult you, then go about scourging you and hanging you, forcing nails into your hands and feet... Regardless of all that and while at the peak of your agony and torment, you would forgive him, pray for him and even champion his cause... That attitude requires some sort of love, which is supernatural and totally unheard of...

Many were those who had been converted to Christianity only because of this verse: *"Father, forgive them for this cause I came to this hour. "* This is My sole consolation and only joy. The reward of all My torment on the Cross, a compensation for all My abuse, insult, bitterness and deprivation...

In other words, these people are overpowered by their sins, overcome by their bondage to the Devil, the weakness of their will and their ignorance; I feel compassion upon them forgetting what they do against me, for *"Love does not seek its own."* My only desire is to let You know that they need Your forgiveness. **Forgive them for that will surely gladden Me, and if that is granted, My mission is considered accomplished and My purpose realised...**

Indeed, why was Christ incarnated? Was it not because He wanted the Lord to forgive these people? Why did He take *"The form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of man"* (Phil 2: 7)? Was it not because He wanted them to be forgiven? Why did He bear our sins? Why was He condemned to death on the Cross? That was all for one purpose; to give us forgiveness...

This phrase *"Forgive them"* was all for announcing the era of forgiveness and that is not a promised forgiveness, but a paid for forgiveness. It is a declaration that the Divine Justice was satisfied that the penalty has been paid in full. It is a deed - a document entitling the purchaser to the merchandise he paid for. He purchased us with His own blood, and the only thing left for Him to do is to take us, to carry us with Him to Paradise that we may enjoy eternal life with Him, and where He is we also will be... It seems as though He was telling the Lord, "What are You asking these people for?" What sort of claim do You have against them? Isn't it that You want to inflict death upon them as a penalty for their sins? Here I am dying in their place. I am paying You off what they owe You. Relieve them of this

verdict! You are being paid in full - shortly after, I will announce to You that "*It is finished*"...

With the words "*Forgive them*" the Lord Jesus Christ declares His triumph over the Devil. All the Devil had strived for was to alienate people from God: to preclude their redemption, to block their path to salvation. But our Lord who was wounded for our transgressions, did open that path, sanctifying the tent with His gushing blood.

His love overcame man's hatred; His meekness triumphed over Satan's vanity...

The people were telling Him: "*If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross*", and He by saying "*Father*" declared that He was the Son. But in spite of being the Son, He would remain on the cross so that He might be able to offer forgiveness to them. If He had come down from the Cross, He would not have been able to say: "*Forgive them*". Only then, the sacrificial love was able to work for giving forgiveness.

"Forgive them" is the supplication that all who had died in hope wished to hear since the beginning of all creation. If the Lord Jesus Christ cherished so much love and forgiveness for His persecutors and antagonists, how much more would be the love and forgiveness He afford His friends and followers!, how thorough would be His forgiveness and how great the reward He would give to them!

The soldiers guarding the Cross were struck by such a pronouncement. The thief on His right was also astounded by

these words. To this thief the Lord made the Second Pronouncement: *"Today you will be with Me in Paradise."*



The Second Word

"Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

The first person to whom the Lord spoke on the cross, was that thief... He did not start his life in fear of God, and his sins led him to the cross. Whilst on the cross, he joined the other thief in reproving the Lord (Matt. 27:43). But suddenly he was transformed and began to have faith. He turned from a reviler to a defender and from a mocker into a man of faith and prayers.

How did he attain that faith and achieve that revival? In what way came he to believe in the Lord, not in His glory but in His torment; while He was being mocked by the people and not while being sought by the multitudes asking to be healed or blessed?

Probably the Lord's forgiveness to His persecutors influenced much that hard-hearted thief, thus God's loving kindness overpowered that man's ferocity. Perhaps Christ's very features, His countenance, His kindly look or His deep warm voice did influence that man! Perhaps the Lord looked at him and his heart fell due to this look! ... We have no way of knowing.

Or could it be that the thief had an inherent disposition to penitence, was a rich soil, which had waited for someone to cultivate it, to pluck its thorns and sow it with suitable seeds; so it might give a good harvest... This malefactor was able to reach

the Lord Jesus Christ with the group of the Eleventh Hour or the Twelfth Hour. **He prayed and was responded to as swiftly as could ever come a response...** Many were those who prayed for long, begged and supplicated with sweat and tears... But that criminal was able to achieve all he wanted by one single concise and pointed sentence. That prayer of his was a source of meditations for many and the whole Church joins this wonderful thief in reciting this prayer, learning it from him.

That thief was the only person who had a quick response from the Lord Jesus Christ, while many were those whom the Lord declined to answer even by a single word...

May I remind you that the Lord Jesus Christ declined to answer many people throughout the period of His trial, torture and crucifixion. *"He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Is 53: 7)*. He had only answered Caiphias the high priest when the latter adjured Him by the Living God (Matt. 26:63-64). Pilate, the Roman governor was greatly astonished at His silence (Matt. 27:14). Many were those who derided Him, but He did not respond, insulted Him without avail, challenged Him saying: *"If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross. "* (Matt. 27.:40), but He never answered them. The malefactor on His left derided and challenged Him saying: *"If you are the Christ, save yourself and us" (Luke 23:39)*, but He did not reply.

However, no sooner had the malefactor on the right side said: *"Remember me when You come to Your Kingdom "*, than

He responded to him saying: *"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23: 42-43).*

How wonderful was the Lord's companionship to that malefactor! He was His companion on the cross and a good one! Their companionship extended because the Lord was not only satisfied with his company on the Cross but He decided that this company would continue also in Paradise! He could have promised him only this much: *"Today you will be in paradise"*, but He actually said to him: *"You will be with Me"*, meaning that he will be one of His retinue, and where the Lord was to be he would be there also. How lucky was this thief! Our Lord was far from being disgusted with that malefactor, He discovered in him on the contrary - a virtuous soul; conversed with him on the Cross, and was delighted to please that malefactor with a promise and an assurance as to his future before facing death...

You will be with Me in Paradise, because your heart has been with Me on earth. For you commended your soul to Me on the Cross, you had your future entrusted to Me and in as much as you suffered with Me, you will be glorified with Me also... You have been crucified and tormented together with Me, and you will also live with Me.

What a wonderful encounter on the Cross that was!

Many were those who encountered God in churches and temples, others encountered Him in their closed bedrooms at times of prayer, but the wonderful thing was to encounter God on the Cross! Did it ever occur to this thief that if he was to

repent one day and encounter God that their meeting would be in that place!

Truly, *"The Kingdom of God does not come with observation "* (Luke 17:20). We have no way to know when and how the Divine Grace acts within a person.

Truly, "The wind blows where it wishes" (John 3:8) This malefactor led a life of wrongfulness and sin, and being as sinful as ever while on the Cross, joined his companion in deriding the Lord... Was he denied then the Divine Grace, or was he forgotten by the Lord forever? .. On the contrary the Lord's grace was awaiting the right time to act on him. Then came the time of redemption and salvation while he was only a few paces from death...

We have no way of knowing who will be chosen. Who thought that this malefactor would be chosen! Who thought that within only one hour this person would achieve what took others tens of years of arduous striving to accomplish? We only go by appearances; We disdain some and pity others, whilst any of those may be far better than ourselves. However, we admit truly that this malefactor entered Paradise deservedly.

He was wonderful, amazingly wonderful in all that he did...

He acknowledged Jesus Christ as the Lord when he said: *"Lord, remember me. "*

He acknowledged Him as king by saying: *"When You come to Your Kingdom... "*

He acknowledged Him as Saviour capable of conveying him to Paradise.

While on the cross, this malefactor confessed his personal sins and admitted that he deserved death. He rebuked the other malefactor saying: *"And we indeed justly: for we receive the due reward of our deeds. "*

He reproached his companion for his abuse of the Lord Jesus Christ, saying: *"Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation... but this man has done nothing wrong. "* (Luke 23:40-41). Thus, he admitted that Christ was righteous and free from sin. Consequently, His crucifixion was not due to a sin of His own, which means that He was crucified for sins perpetrated by others.

It is really amazing that among all these multitudes, the only person who defended the Lord Jesus Christ was that malefactor! None among the twelve disciples did defend Him, none among the seventy apostles, none among those who were healed by Him, or those whose demons He exorcised... Nobody at all did defend Him... He had to stand trial alone. Now the only person who defended His cause and would not allow one word of abuse to be directed to Him was the malefactor on His right side! Could any of the disciples or the believers have imagined that the only person to champion the Lord's cause would be a thief! Truly the Lord Said: *"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones"* (Matt. 18:10).

Brother, do not ever think vainly of your worthiness or that you are better than such persons. Never think that you are equal to any of the apostles or the close followers of the Lord. All of those stood aloof and came not to the defense of Christ. The only defender was the thief: a person least expected to that, and totally unknown...

A really wonderful thing about this malefactor is that besides his defense of Christ, he was all preoccupied with his eternal life. He was all anxious to prepare himself for the Hereafter. He was, like Christ, not very much concerned about his physical pain, but really worried about his eternal life. Thus, in all penitence and supplication, he said: *"Lord, remember me"*, Remember me with Your grace and not for my sins. Or as David said: *"Remember, O LORD, Your tender mercies and Your loving kindness, For they are from of old. 7 Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; According to Your mercy remember me, For Your goodness' sake, O LORD. " (Ps. 25: 6 & 7).*

"Remember me", and remember not to count me among those of whom you said: *"I do not know"*.. Remember this companionship, **the few hours I spent next to You on the Cross are the most valuable in my life... They are the happiest of all.** I enjoyed the partnership of Your passions and can proudly say: *"I am crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20).*

For the sake of this companionship; remember me! My crucifixion with You, side by side was certainly shameful for you, but it is a source of eternal pride for me. Satisfied will I be

with these few hours at Your side, but I wish I could make it only the point of departure for a long lasting friendship.

The words "**Remember me**" points to the existence of a prior relationship. It means that I have been already known to You that I am marked down in Your records: inscribed on Your palm.

Lord, You were "Numbered with the transgressor" (Is 53:12); crucified with the sinful, but while that is considered a disgrace to You, it is a source of grace and bliss for me... How delightful it is to be near You, that alleviates all my pain. .. on the contrary, I feel no pain but Your spirit infiltrating all my body, purifying and sanctifying me, and turning me into a new person. You are like the rays of the sun that never get polluted by filthy bodies, but rather purify them... **I am really covetous of Your friendship, I wish I had known you before. So, remember me!**

I wish that everyone among us would join this thief in saying: "Remember me " Remember that You have a son in a faraway land, a prodigal servant excluded from Your house. Remember me in my weakness, in my humiliation, in my bondage and in my downfall so You might raise me and redeem my spirit. Remember me because I have nobody to remember me. "*I have no man when the water is stirred up, to put me into the pool*" (John 5:7)..

The story of this thief points to the fact that people's actions differ at the hour of death. One would say that the thief just remembered the Lord and was penitent as he was

bound to do so shortly before his death. On the contrary, the other malefactor was also facing death but, as the Bible says, he was deriding Christ, never feared God or was a bit concerned about his eternal life; all he cared for was to get rid of the cross (Luke 23:39) to resume his, wasteful life... At that point he was rebuked by his companion. **At the moment of death he was not at all repentant but went on committing other transgressions and with the same callousness!..** The thief on the left side of Christ was also close to Christ as far as physical distance is concerned, but his mind was so far away from Him; even at the time of death! The moment of death would not remind him of penitence, or urge him to take stock, not by any means...

He was not a bit moved by Christ's forgiveness to His persecutors; he was not even jealous of the promise attained by his companion to enter Paradise. He never had faith even after the earth had shaken, the rocks cracked and darkness reigned over the area... He was very much heedless of his eternity, even at the moment of death. He was still in love with the world and the recapture of the earthly life... He wanted nothing of Christ or His companionship except to make Him facilitate his coming down from the cross...

This story carries a very severe lesson to those who postpone their act of penitence, thinking that they can do this at the closing days of their earthly life though nobody knows when! Many will be those who will act like the thief of the left side; cursing, rebelling and wanting to continue with their life! He who has been pinned to a habit will find it hard to renounce his habit even if spikes were driven into his flesh and

he was about to give up the ghost! If man is not responding to God's grace, yielding to God's providence he could sin even at the moment of his death.

Many are those who break into tears at the approaching moment of death, not because they want penitence, but because death will deprive them from their worldly passions! They cry because death will sever them from their beloved and their desires. The world is still delightful to them even at the moment of death. Do not assume that death necessarily brings man to submission! That might apply to some but not to all. The thief on the right did take advantage of the moment of death while the other did not. When the thief of the left was still deriding and rebuking the Lord, his companion went on supplicating in these words: *"Remember me when You come to Your Kingdom "*.

The Lord did not disregard the penitent thief. He did not even hesitate in responding to his prayer. The answer came faster than the thief could have ever imagined. He did not, at the imminent moment of death, despair of the Lord's forgiveness. The Lord in turn assured him firmly by saying: *"Assuredly, I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise"*.

You are with Me now and shortly after, you will also be with Me, but much difference is there between both situations; As you were with Me in torment, you will be with Me in Paradise. Here you find torment; there you will find consolation...

When the Lord said: *'In Paradise'* ; He was correcting an error of the malefactor, and He did that with His

overcame calmness and kindness... The malefactor said: *Remember me when You come to Your Kingdom,* " Rightly he believed that Christ has a spiritual kingdom in heaven, and that His kingdom is not of this world as some people claim. Yet people will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven till after the Day of Judgment. Following death, people go to a waiting place. And this is Paradise for the faithful. Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ did not answer the malefactor, saying that, "Today you will be in My Kingdom of Heaven". He said, instead: *"In Paradise"*. In that, He continued His mission as a kindly teacher, even while on the Cross, and with His ever humble attitude. He was a teacher who points out the error to the erring person without rebuke or reproach.

"You will be with Me in Paradise" is a pledge.. and you will come also with Me in My second advent on the clouds. You will stand at My right on the Day of Judgment, as you are now on My right on the Cross. You will represent the righteous, you will reign with Me in My kingdom and will be with Me throughout Eternity... Here I am with you every day and forever after...

Perhaps this pledge encouraged the thief to accept death with joy; with the great expectation to be with Christ... Thus, we can say with the thief how delightful is death! *"Oh, death, where is your sting?"* Death terrifies the sinful but is a source of joy for those who die in hope, those who have been assured of their eternal life and their crowns, those who have listened to Christ saying: *"Today you will be with Me in Paradise"*.

When the Lord said, "You will be with Me in Paradise' ; He did not only declare to the thief that he had already been forgiven but that Paradise was also now open once again since Adam. Paradise was closed all this time; inaccessible to any human spirit because of the original sin. Actually we recite words whenever we bid farewell to a departing soul, we say at the funeral service: "Lord, open for this soul the gates of Paradise as You did for that thief."

The forgiveness endowed the thief was an act of God and the opening of the gates of Paradise was also a Divine Act. Two actions taken by the Lord on the Cross demonstrate His divinity: He did not merely request forgiveness for the thief and that he may be in Paradise, but Christ's words were almost imperative: "Today you will be with Me' ; as if He had assumed His position as a Righteous Judge designing the eternal life of a human being. Being now in that position, He decided that the thief should enter Paradise the same day. Can any human do that? His is a Divine authority not to be practiced by any man. As for the opening of Paradise; was that within the power even of a high priest or prophet? Absolutely not! All of them waited for the Saviour to open it. It is a divine action. It is also a declaration of the adequacy of the blood shed for us to open the gates of Paradise.

Truly He has the power and the authority. *"He that opens, and no man shuts: And shuts, and no man opens" (Rev 3: 7 - Is 22:22). "And have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev 12:18).* Furthermore, He has the keys of Heaven and earth, and has the power to give them to His disciples and followers on earth. He was the one who opened the gate to the wise virgins.

To Him the foolish prayed, saying: "*Lord, Lord, open to us*" (*Matt. 25:11*). Nevertheless, He would not open His Paradise except for those who confide in Him, the way the thief of the right did and so deserved to hear the words "*Today you will be with Me in Paradise*".

The word "Today" undoubtedly proves that there is no purgatory as some Christians believe. The malefactor entered Paradise the same day he died, without staying in the so-called purgatory, even for one hour! The word Today also defeats the assumption that the spirit of the deceased keeps haunting their place of residence on earth until the third day, and a Mass has to be performed to drive away these spirits! Did the spirit of the thief linger to the third day? Or, did it enter Paradise the same day?.

With the word "Paradise", the Lord indicated the place where men go after death; it also explains that Paradise is the waiting place for the faithful and that they will be there enjoying the company of Christ until the Day of Judgment...

Let us contemplate the verse, "*Today you will be with Me*". How delightful it is to be in the company of the Lord! To be with the Lord is more pleasant than to be in Paradise, or rather it is the best that we can have in Paradise.

That is exactly what the Lord promised us. "*I will come again, and receive you to Myself,; that where I am, there you may be also.* " (*John 14:3*).

How wonderful is that promise! It is our hope and our goal that we passionately strive for...

Our spiritual life is all in all a togetherness with the Lord...

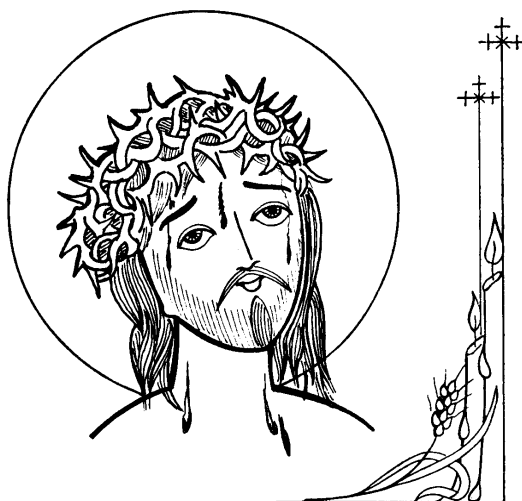
With these words, the Lord made the thief happy and in spite of the physical pain of crucifixion the Lord endeavoured to assure the thief, to converse with him and please him. The Lord Jesus Christ became oblivious of all His excruciating pain of thorns, cuts, and scourging. He devotedly listened to that malefactor, conversed and assured him... Truly, "*Love does not seek its own*" (1 Cor 13:5). "*Let no man seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.*" (1 Cor. 10:24) In many instances we are approached by others, while being busy and we feel so disgusted and annoyed. We tell them that we have no time for them, and tell them to come back later. Consider the Lord, He would not say any of that even while being on the Cross.

Regardless of His torment, He lent an ear to the malefactor, offered him the attention he needed; responded to his supplication; brought delight to his heart; and demonstrated to all of us that it is possible to attend to others' needs even while on the Cross...

The Lord also demonstrated to us by the attention He offered the malefactor that the attention given to a single individual is as important as attention provided to a group. In addition to His sacrificial act offered to all the world and for every believer, and in addition to His forgiveness to His persecutors, He attended to the needs of an individual: the thief. For to the Lord Christ an individual has all the right to be attended to, as well as all the group. An individual still holds the same importance and significance as the multitude...

Thus, we see that the Lord Jesus Christ, while preaching the gospel was working individually and collectively. He attended to the multitudes in His Sermon on the Mount and among the five thousand whom He fed with five loaves and two fishes. Likewise He worked with individuals as He did with the Twelve Disciples or three of them: Peter, James and John; or with Nicodemus, with Mary and Martha at their home or with the Samaritan woman at the well...

God does not forget the individual among the group. The lost sheep would not be lost and forgotten overridden by the remaining ninety-nine... The malefactor's soul would not be lost only because the whole world's salvation is at stake!



The Third Word

"Woman, behold your son... Behold your mother" (John 19:26 & 27).

The Lord was preoccupied by the others while on the Cross. He was concerned about His persecutors, saying: *"Father, forgive them "*. He cared for the thief on His right, promising him Paradise, saying: *"Today you will be with Me in Paradise"*; He also directed His attention to His mother, entrusting His beloved disciple, John with the task of taking care of her.

He entrusted His virgin disciple with His Virgin Mother. He entrusted His mother, who nursed and cherished Him dearly, to His beloved disciple who in many an instance lent back on his breast.

He entrusted His mother who stood beside His cross, to the only disciple who followed Him to the Cross. He entrusted His mother who carried in her womb the smouldering ember of His divinity to His disciple who wrote the gospel to establish this Divinity.

He said to her: *"Behold your son... "* and said to him: *"Behold your mother "And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home" (John 19:27).*

Thus the Lord gave us an example of giving care to our kin, and our mothers in particular. He was concerned about that receptacle which held Him for nine months; the mother who

cared for Him in His childhood and to whom He was obedient. (Luke 2:51).

Normally, a person in pain receives the attention of others, but the Lord Christ in His pain was the one caring for others... How much more can His care be for us now in His repose...

His first concern was to forgive the sins, then He turned to social care and the first one to receive His care was His mother.

There are some people who came to believe that the Lord, in His emphasis on the spiritual ties, has annulled family ties, as a misinterpretation of His pronouncement: *"Who is My mother and who are My brethren?.. For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother "* (Matt. 12:48-50). The Lord on the Cross refuted this false belief.

Dedication and devotion to God, and to the Universal Church does not necessarily mean that a person should neglect his kin, especially his household. *"But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of His household, He has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever. "* (1Tim. 5:8) Such devotion does not give a person excuse for the neglect of his parents and his mother in particular.

It seems that the Lord Christ and His holy mother Virgin Mary were destined to meet in this manner. Her holy face was the first face He saw on His advent to the world in human form, and was also the last face He saw before commending His spirit into the hands of the Father. She was a loving mother who followed her Son wherever He went and

clung to Him in His torment in the deepest love and compassion, lulling Him with these impressive words:

"The world rejoices at the acceptance of salvation, but my heart burns fiercely at the sight of Your crucifixion which You bear patiently for the sake of all, Oh, my Son and my God". Here we see also a loving Son who cares for His mother even at the moment of His deepest pain.

Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ saw that he must take care of His mother at the time of her distress, to console her through her grief. "*A sword shall pierce. Through your own soul, also*" (Luke 2:35)... He thought it proper, being a Son, to comfort His mother in her distress. **He comforted her by talking to her, caring for her, managing her affairs, and offering her a spiritual son to keep her company...**

Christ's dialogue with His mother while on the cross was different from that between Him and the thief on the right side. The thief started the dialogue, and the Lord responded to him.

With the blessed-mother, the Lord was the one who addressed her first - He did not wait for her to talk first. He did not wait until she expressed her grief. Truly, she would not have said a word of complaint... She had been used to keeping her peace. Even at the side of the Cross she did not cry. On the contrary she was calm and composed, mourning in silence. The Lord knew what she was silent about, was conscious to her inner thoughts and feelings, so, He addressed her without her asking to be talked to and the blessed mother obeyed her Son and went to live with the beloved disciple...

The Virgin was a real blessing to St. John and his household, a blessing that Christ gave him in return for his love. St. John accepted her as a precious and a valuable gift and she remained in his home cared and attended to until her death. It is said that St. John did not leave Jerusalem till the holy Virgin departed... St. John so loved the Lord Christ that he followed Him to the Cross, remained at His side throughout His passions. He certainly deserved a reward, on earth as well as in Heaven. As for his reward on earth, he was blessed with sheltering the holy Virgin in his home. In fact all those who follow the Lord Christ will surely be rewarded and will have His bliss and grace.

The blessed Mother in turn accepted St. John as a son to her. The Lord offered her the most faithful, sympathetic and loving one among His disciples.

St. John was the most ardent exponent of love. It was he who said, "*God is love*" (1 John 4:16), and was also the disciple who "*Was Leaning on Jesus' bosom* " ". . . whom Jesus loved. " He was the only one who offered the Virgin mother the image of her Son..

Christ on the Cross seemed not to possess anything; even His garment was taken away and torn, **But He had, then, John, His disciple, and that He gave to His mother.** John gave his heart to Christ. And Christ took that heart and gave it to His mother. Thus, the Lord brought together those who loved Him... He took care of His mother emotionally and at the same time He provided for her living...

I keep wondering: who was caring for the other: St. John or the holy Virgin! Virgin Mary was there at John's home not to depend on him for her living, but to nourish him with her bliss and grace; and also, to acquaint him deeply and thoroughly with the Lord Christ...

The fact that the Lord Christ entrusted St. John with His mother refutes undoubtedly the allegations made by the Protestants that Virgin Mary had other children besides Jesus Christ. If that was true any one of her sons would have been better qualified to take care of her. They would have had more of a right to that than any person outside their family circle. Virgin Mary was without kin at that time; she had no children and Joseph passed away a long time ago. For that reason Christ entrusted His disciple with His Mother. *"Behold your son"* ... These words give us an idea about the spiritual relation of a son and his mother and demonstrate the honour given the Virgin even with respect to the father apostles.



The Fourth Word

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46).

This statement does not mean a separation of the divine nature of Jesus Christ from His human nature, nor does it mean that the Father has forsaken the Son. It means rather that the Father has allowed Him to be tormented.

His divine nature and His human nature were never separated for a single moment or a wink of the eye. That is what we firmly believe in and what we recite in the Holy Mass... If ever His divine nature deserted Him, His redemption could never have been considered as infinite, rendering infinite salvation, capable of atoning for the sins of all humanity throughout the ages. Thus, there was no rupture between His divine and human nature.

As for His relationship with the Father, the Father did not forsake Him. Let us only consider this verse: *"Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me" (John 14:11).*

What is the meaning then of, "Why have You forsaken Me?"

It does not mean a separation; it indicates only that the Father did allow that He should suffer; that He should bear the blame and suffer God's wrath over sin. That goes for the

emotional torment He underwent. As for the physical pain; God allowed that He should suffer physically though God, in His omnipotence, could have made Him insensible to pain. But, if that had happened, the Crucifixion would have been null and void - for pain would never have been experienced and consequently, no penalty has been inflicted, no acquittal effected and no redemption accomplished...

Thus, the Father allowed that the Son should suffer, and the Son accepted that ordinance and was also afflicted by it. In fact Christ came to the world for that particular reason.. It was a rupture that both parties preconceived and agreed to... for the sake of humanity, and the Divine Justice...

God allowed that Jesus should suffer, sacrifice Himself and be tortured but did not break away from Him... It was not a separation but rather a dispensation. God suffered that His Son should suffer but still loved him fully, *"Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him" (Is. 53:10).*

An example that may make the meaning easy to grasp:

Suppose a parent accompanied his child to the hospital for an operation, let us say for the removal of an abscess; that the parent was holding the child's hand while the surgeon went on with his incision. The child would then start to cry and plead with his father not to let that happen to him saying to him, "Why did you forsake me? "

In fact, the father did not desert his child, he only allowed him to suffer since the operation was for his own good and he had only total care and love for his child.

This incident, I would say, demonstrates how that could be considered abandonment without actual severance of ties.

The word "*Forsaken* " means that the torment of Crucifixion was actual and that God's wrath was excruciating... The act of abandonment was the climax of all torment on the Cross; all torment of redemption... Here Christ resembles a burnt sacrifice. An offering to God for the atonement of sin - to be consumed by the divine fire until it turns to ashes and satisfies fully the Divine Justice..

A great number of theologians do believe that the Lord when saying, "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me*" was reminding the Jews of the Twenty-second Psalm which starts with the same verse.

They were referred to as those who, *Do not knowing the Scriptures (Matt. 22:29)* while those Scriptures testified of Him (John 5:39). So the Lord Christ chose to remind them of this particular Psalm. Actually the system of numbering the Psalms was not known to the Jews. They used to identify each Psalm by its opening verse, as it is the custom among the Egyptian monks nowadays...

What does this Psalm tell us about Jesus Christ?

"They have pierced My hands and My feet, I can count all My bones; they look and stare at Me; they divide My garments

among them, And for My clothing they cast lots. "
(Ps 22:16-18).

It is all evident that David the Prophet, who composed this Psalm, had nobody pierce his hands or feet. Nobody parted his garments or cast lots upon his vesture. This verse was actually an inspired prophecy about Jesus Christ - as if Christ on the Cross was telling the Jews: "Go ahead and read the Psalm, starting with: *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* and see what has been told about Me. You will see also that the following has been said about Me:

"A reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they, that see Me, laugh Me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying: He trusted in the Lord that He would deliver Him, let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him "
(Ps 22: 6 8).

To analyze this entire Psalm would require more space than we have... It illustrates Christ's sufferings on the Cross. *"Then He opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures."* (Luke 24:45).

All that the Psalm described began to be realised. Thus, He was able to say shortly after: *"It is finished.* " But why did they not say, *"It is finished"* right after His pronouncement: *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* The reason is that there is another verse in this Psalm that was not yet realised which is: *"My strength is dried up like a potsherd: and My tongue clings to My jaws. "* (Ps. 22:15) this part will be realised later when He says: *"I thirst "*. That is why He said, *"It is finished"* right after.

Then why did the Lord Christ say: "My God, My God?"

He said that in His capacity as a representative of humanity.

He said that because He took the shape of a servant, and became similar to man. *"But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men "* (Phil. 2: 7 and 8). He said these words because *"He humbled Himself", "and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross"* (Phil. 2:9) He spoke as the Son of man, who has taken over a human nature and taken man's position, and agreed to represent humanity before God, assumed all human sins and is paying off all their debts.

Here we see that all humanity is talking through Him...

As He assumed all human sins, and a sin is a separation from God and a cause of God's wrath, all humanity is crying through Christ, saying: *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*...

Christ represented humanity in so many things if not in all things! !

Christ did fast on our behalf:

Adam and Eve were not able to abstain from the forbidden fruit and they plucked it and ate. As for Christ, He began His life by abstaining even from all edibles. He was in no need to fast, but He fasted forty days and forty nights as mentioned in the church hymns.

He represented us in observing God's law:

"The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any who understand, and seek God. They have all gone aside, they have all together become corrupt; " (Ps. 14:2,3).

When Christ came, He represented humanity in being obedient to God. He observed the Law, *"To fulfil all righteousness"* (Matt. 3:15) as He mentioned at the time of baptism. Thus, He acted the part of humanity in offering God a chaste and a gracious acceptable life...

He represented us in death, torment and the atonement of sin:

"For He has made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin" (2 Cor 5:21). He suffered all God's wrath for the sinful with all the bitterness therein. And as a representative of humanity said: ***"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*** **And He who helped everybody and has never forsaken any person, was forsaken by all, even by the Father.** In that way He paid off our debt and suffered God's wrath and emerged triumphant, having been tried emotionally and physically...

He also gave us that a poignant lesson so that we may be more cautious.

If sin would have as a consequence all such abandonment and pain, we should: *"See then that we walk circumspectly"* (Eph. 5:15). We should be wary about abandoning God so that God would not abandon us in turn. The

Son Himself has been forsaken. The torment of being abandoned is unbearable. We should thank our Lord Jesus Christ for all that love and for all His abnegation..

The words: *"why have You forsaken Me?"* should be a source of consolation for us when we encounter any difficulty. Knowing that if the Lord has not *"Spared His Own Son"* (Rom. 8:32), why should we grumble about whatever suffering God allows? God was pleased to put His own beloved Son to Grief. And in spite of His saying *"This is My Beloved, Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matt. 3:17), why do we grumble at the moments of trial though we could never suffer as much as Christ suffered and though we deserve to be punished. The Son drank willingly the cup that the Father offered Him. He only said, *"Your will be done"* and was obedient until death on the Cross. His pronouncement: *"why have You forsaken Me?"* was not a complaint or protest, as we have said before but it was only an expression of the reality of His suffering and a declaration that the act of redemption is being realised...



The Fifth Word

"I thirst " (John 19:28).

Because of my sins and yours, brethren, the Lord Jesus Christ said: *"and My tongue clings to My jaws... My strength is dried up like a potsherd"* (Ps. 22:15).

All His body liquids had been drained for so many reasons: For all the sweat that His body bled while struggling for our salvation in the Garden in Gethsemane: *"His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground!"* (Luke 22:44). For all His sweating as He carried the cross along the way, under the scorching sun at noon. For all His exhaustion and fatigue resulting from extended court sessions and also the scourging. Add to that the extensive bleeding from the scourging, thorns on His head and nails piercing His flesh. For all that His tongue clung to His jaws, and His bodily resistance had gone and He said: *"I thirst"*.

By this declaration, He indicated that the hot iron began to be struck or that the fire had begun to consume the sacrifice.. Divine Justice was being done, and His divinity refrained from alleviating the physical pain that His human body was suffering. His was pain in its absolute sense, pain that pleased the Father and made Him smell a soothing aroma, The Son expressed this by declaring: *"I thirst"?* By this declaration, the heretics are put to shame. Those who tried to under-rate the human nature of the Lord on the cross. If

he had not been fully human, He would not have said: "*I thirst*."...

However, one is apt to wonder how Jesus became thirsty, though He is the well and the source of the living water: "*If anyone thirst, let him come to Me, and drink*" (John 7:37). He said to the Samaritan woman: "*But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.*" (John 4:14).

What did He really mean by the words, "I thirst":

Certainly, He was thirsty in the physical sense. Also, that spiritually He was thirsty for the forthcoming salvation that He was offering to the world. He experienced an eager desire to the concluding statement: "***It is finished***".

There is an analogy between what He said now and what He said to the Samaritan: "*Give Me a drink.*" He was not then referring to water in the common sense, knowing that "*Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again,*" (John 4: 7,13). He was thirsty for her and for all the Samaritans; for her salvation and for theirs.

He did not say, "I thirst" to get water from the people around Him. He knew that they would offer Him vinegar (Matt. 27:44, 48). He knew that through His divine power that enables Him to predict what is going to happen, He knew that because of the prophecy: "***And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.***" (Ps. 69:21).

He did not say: *"I thirst"* ; asking them to bring Him water, because He could not ask a human being for help and also because He intended to drink the cup of pains to its end. That is why He shunned the cup of vinegar mixed with gall that was offered Him to kill His pain, *"They gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall. And when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink"* (Matt. 27. 34). **The Lord wished that all the prophecies would be realised, and declared that the redemption had been accomplished and that humanity could rest assured...**

However, the sinful human beings mocked Him at the time He struggled for their salvation, and offered Him vinegar instead of water, to double His pain.

I wonder, Brethren, that perhaps we are still doing the same. The Lord thirst for our salvation and for drinking of the product of the vine which sap flows within us, but we offer Him instead the vinegar of our trespasses, inadvertence and neglect.

Would you please, Brethren, withdraw that spear that you are pointing at Christ's mouth and spare His lips from that sponge of vinegar? Would you regret hurting the feelings of the one who loved you dearly, and do what you should do in penitence? And if you heard the Lord saying: *"I thirst"* you may tell Him: I am the one who made your tongue cleave to your jaws due to my sins and trespasses. I wish I could quench your thirst by my tears. I wish you could strike my adamant soul and drink from its gushing waters...

The Sixth Word

"It is finished " (John 19:30).

Our Lord Jesus Christ the righteous and perfect in everything; the holy and the one - and only one - who committed no sin; the one who lived on earth a whole life to the full satisfaction and pleasure of God the Father, was also perfect in His preaching and ministry. He was able to accomplish what the Father wanted Him to accomplish and then cry triumphantly: *"I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17. 4).*

He was able to accomplish every righteousness, that which the Law required. He was able deservedly to declare: *"Which of you convicts Me of sin " (John 8: 46).* He realised all prophecies regarding His advent and the great act of redemption... all within the span of three years and a few months. He achieved things that nobody was able to achieve before. He was able to spread the Gospel and say to the Lord: *"I have glorified You on the earth... I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world... For I have given to them the words which You have given Me... those whom You gave Me I have kept, and none of them is lost... And I have declared to them Your name and will declare it" (John 17:4-6).*

Thus, He realised the prophecies, accomplished obedience and every righteousness, performed His ministry and gave His

love in full to His own whom He loved to the end (John13:1). Then He ascended the cross to accomplish His sacrificial act, to bring about redemption, forgiveness and salvation to finish the act of reconciliation between Heaven and earth; between the spiritual and the carnal.

On that altar He carried on Himself the iniquities of us all ... all the sins of all people throughout the ages from Adam to eternity - outrageous sins as they are: profanity, perfidy, failing, adultery, dissipation, theft, murder, envy and arrogance. Then He was able to declare: "*It is finished*" ... We, in turn, touch this pure offering, and confess our sins everyday and add them to His pains that He might forgive us, and that His blood may atone for our new trespasses...

As sins were accumulated to the ultimate upon His person, shame and disgrace were fully personified in Him as it is said: "*I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.*" (Is. 50:6), He said also: "*All those that see Me, laugh Me to scorn... A reproach of men, and despised of the people*". (Ps. 22: 6, 7).

In all that, He was subjected to scourging, humiliation and derision: "*Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands, saying, "Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?"*" (Matt. 26: 67, 68). They dressed Him in the purple garment, crowned Him with thorns and crucified Him between two malefactors so that the prophecy may come true "*Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree*" (Gal. 3:13, Deut 21:23).

Even on the cross He was still a target of humiliation and derision so that He might realise all His disgrace and cry: "*It is finished.*"

And as His disgrace was complete, His physical pain and God's wrath were perfected. The Lord has paid it all -- offered Himself as a sacrifice, and the fire went on, consuming His offering until it turned into ashes (Lev 6:10).

When Our Lord realised that He had completed the act of redemption and atonement, and that He had satisfied the divine justice fully and nothing else could be done, He cried triumphantly: "*It is finished.*"

The act of salvation for all has been accomplished, redemption has been fulfilled; the Son of Man was able to crush the serpent's head. God, by reigning over the cross (Ps. 96:10), was able to demolish the kingdom of the devil. The atonement now became all encompassing and adequate to liberate everybody. Now the veil of the temple could be rent in twain, and the way to the sanctuary could be opened; reconciliation is now accomplished and the hope of the deceased saints have been fulfilled. Nothing is left for You, God, but to, "*gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty, with Your glory and Your Majesty*" (Ps. 45:3); the Lord cried in joy; "*It is finished.*"

The words, "*It is finished*" is the cry of joy and triumph. He had fought and won. He was able to pay for us and establish His heavenly spiritual kingdom - to shutter the kingdom of the devil that was formerly called "*The prince of the world.*" (John 24:30).

Could you, Brethren, win what the Lord has won? Could you ascend the cross and crush the head of the serpent? Could you look at the work God assigned to you and say: *"It is finished"*?

I wish you would always consider this maximum:

"I have finished the work which You, God, have given Me to do. " ..

Put before you always the picture of the Lord perfecting His mission.



The Seventh Word

"Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46).

The Lord accomplished His work of the Cross in the same manner He accomplished His work before the Crucifixion.

There remained one more job for Him to do after His death on the Cross. There remains for Him to: *"Lead captivity captive and gave gifts to men" (Eph 4:8)*. There remains for Him to descend to Hades and carry the good news to the faithful among the deceased, to transfer those deceased saints from Hades to Paradise, thus opening Paradise for the first time since the original sin...

Since the Act of Redemption had been accomplished, there was no reason for further delay. He had to depart from this body to accomplish the act of salvation for the deceased also. He had to entrust the Father with His soul in order to do what was designated to be done after death. Thus, He cried with a loud voice: *"Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit"...*

Into Your hands I commend My spirit and in no other hands...*"For the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me." (John 14:30). "I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father." (John 16:28).*

How desirous was the prince of this world to acquire this spirit; to arrest this spirit in the same manner as he arrested all other spirits that were imprisoned. But in no way could he do that with this particular spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, which was received by the Father Himself. This is My spirit, "*No man takes it from Me I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again*".

When Poor Lazarus died, his spirit was carried away by the angels (Luke 16:22). The spirit of the Virgin Mother Mary was carried by Christ but the spirit of Christ was carried by the Father.

St. Matthew the Apostle says that Jesus "*Had cried with a loud voice*" (Matt. 27:50), then yielded up the ghost, what can we know from this phrase?

Undoubtedly Christ was greatly exhausted due to all the exertion of carrying the cross to the extent of falling underneath it, and also, after being scourged, bruised and pierced with nails and having bled and perspired so much that He had His mouth all dry when He said: "*I thirst*".

How then is it to be expected that He could **cry with a loud voice?**

Crying with a loud voice at the hour of His death means that He had another power that surpassed His human power. In other words it demonstrates His divinity.

His crying aloud indicates His triumph for with death He defeated death. This loud cry shook the Devil and overthrew his kingdom.

Truly, Christ's death was a triumph by which He saved the whole world and crushed the serpent...

The words, *"Into Your hands I commend My spirit"* affords us a great assurance of the immortality of the spirit. The spirit does not end with death... death for the spirit is only a change from one type of existence to another. The question is where would the spirit land after death. If man is assured about the answer, man will accept death with joy, saying with St. Paul: *"I have a desire to depart."* . **Brother, are you sure about the destination of your spirit?** Is it that when you give up your spirit after a lengthy life, you will commend it into the hands of Christ or that the angels would carry your spirit as it did to that of Lazarus? Or is it that the devil will claim it saying, "It is mine, it was one of my soldiers under my command.. so I will take it to be with me. "? How awful would that be! ! Would you, brother, make sure then about the destination of your spirit!

Be sure, my beloved, to remember always this beautiful chant: *"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his "* (Num 23:10).

Commend your spirit from now on into His hands by shunning all evil and by living in unison with God. Be like the angels of the Seven Churches whom God was carrying in His right hand. Commend yourself also into the hands of the

Lord Jesus Christ. Be sure that you will hear His beautiful voice chanting: *"And I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish, **neither shall anyone snatch them out of My Father's hand.**" (John 10:28, 29).*

Whenever you feel tempted by a sin or lust, ask yourself this question: Is my spirit now in the hands of the Lord?...



The Effectiveness Of These Words In Our Lives

These valuable words said by the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross are worthy of being cherished by all of us. Let them have their effect on our lives... Let us weight in our minds every word and react to it... Here are two examples as to how we can react to two pronouncements:

Father, forgive them:

The Lord had taught us to say in the Lord's prayer, "*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*" Thus, the words "*Father, forgive them*" have become a prerequisite to forgiveness for yourself.

Let nobody imagine that he is offering forgiveness to the others when he says: "*Father, forgive them.*" He is actually acquiring forgiveness for himself. For, it is the prerequisite of getting forgiveness for yourself, to forgive the others. "*Forgive, and you will be forgiven*" (Luke 6:37).

The Lord Jesus Christ did not comment on any verse except this one when He taught us the Lord's Prayer. He said: "*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you*" (Matt. 6:14,1:5).

Consequently, if you do not forgive others, you preclude forgiveness for yourself and not for others.

If you say: "Father, forgive them", He will, answer you saying: *'I will forgive you, too.'* Thus, your forgiveness to others is something you are bound to do , if you wish to be forgiven yourself... **You are better off then, if your forgiveness - as it is the case with Christ - is based on love, not being an obligation for obtaining forgiveness for yourself...**

Probably this forgiveness to others would annoy you inwardly and would not be acceptable to your reason and judgment. How can I forgive that person who so much annoyed, aggravated and humiliated me? I should tell you: Just endure and be patient. Actually when you offer forgiveness to this person, you are offering it to yourself. Then forgive, that God might forgive you. And I repeat; let your forgiveness be for love and not as a necessity.

When the Lord Christ came to the Cross asking the Father forgiveness for all the sins of people, He began by forgiving His persecutors first.

It was as if Christ was saying to the Father: *'I forgive them for all they did, so that you may forgive Me'* - not because He wanted the Father to forgive His sins - for Christ was without sin, *"Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46)* but to forgive the sins He carried for others, for He is *"The Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)*, *"And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Is. 53:6)*.

You may say, `How can I forgive them for all they did to me? Is it not enough that I am keeping my peace and not returning evil for evil?...

No, my dear, this peace is not enough, you have to overcome your inner feelings and forgive willingly...

When you have won the battle within yourself, and forgiven for love, you will have ascended the Cross.

When you ascend the Cross you will be able to say: *"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings"* (Phil. 3:10). You have partaken the Lord in His suffering, ascended with Him the Cross and forgiven the offenders for they know not what they are doing.

"Today you will be with Me in Paradise"

Say to yourself, `if I wish to have that promise from the Lord Christ, I should say as the malefactor has said: *"For we receive the due reward of our deeds "*...

The malefactor on the right side of the Lord did not rebel against the torment he was subjected to. On the contrary, all he wanted was to be forgiven in eternity. This is an example to follow and not that of the other convict who asked that Christ would come down from the Cross and let him come down also, or as he said, Save Yourself and us. What a wretched fellow he was.

For Christ to come down from the Cross would have brought the damnation of the whole world. If that thief was seeking salvation of his spirit, he would have said `Would you please, Lord, stay a little on the Cross, for my sake, so that I may not

perish. Please, Lord, bear up your pain for my sake, endure until death, so that you may pay the price of all my sins.' ...

Be spiritual, brother, as the thief on the right side who was anxious for his eternal life and not be as carnal as the thief on the left who cared for nothing but to save his body.

Also, do not shun or rebel against any crisis in your life, but you should say as the penitent thief has said: *"For we receive the due reward of our deeds."*

If you ask the Lord to remember you in His kingdom, by the same token you should remember Him on earth and cling to Him with love and adoration...

Do not ask the Lord to remember you only on earth but also in His kingdom. No matter what the earth has in store for you -- nails, crosses or suffering -- the only thing that counts is your future life in the heavenly kingdom.

It does not matter if we spend our life on earth nailed to a cross.. the only thing that matters is to be with the Lord in His Paradise...

Do not seek to come down from your cross, but persevere and endure.

The Lord has said to the thief: *"Today You will be with Me in Paradise."* ; because He accepted His faith, confession and penitence.

As for you, Brother, did you offer God faith, confession and penitence in order to be worthy of His company in Paradise?

If you have not done that already, start now!???

Take part in His suffering so that you may be glorified with Him also.

Remember that the words: "*Today you will be with Me in Paradise*" are very reassuring and apt to fill you with joy and hope.

And if the thief has gotten a promise to be in Paradise, you should be in no way discouraged whatever your sins may be.

If the thief's penitence was accepted in the last moments of his life, you should not give up even if all your past life has been a waste.

The Lord's pledge to the thief illustrates fully how fast God's response to our prayers could be.

As soon as the thief said: "*Remember me, Lord*"; he received an answer: ; "*Today you will be with Me in Paradise*". Thus, persevere in your prayers and supplications, and keep reciting: "Lord, remember me" ... say this over and over, from the bottom of your heart and with faith, and be sure that God will respond to you.

Do not succumb to the Devil and let shame or pride preclude you from asking. The tax-collector in his deep shame said: "Lord, have mercy on me." the thief in his

acknowledgment of his sins, said, however: "*Lord, remember me.*"

In the same manner, in spite of all the shame we experience because of our sins, and in spite of the fact that we have no means of defense or excuse, we would still recite the words: "Lord, remember me" because we have much more faith in His love and forgiveness until we get a pledge to be with Him in Paradise.

The Lord did not promise the thief to be in Paradise only, but He pledged further that the thief will be in His company. Actually the best thing in paradise is to be with the Lord...

Truly, Paradise without the Lord is nothing, and no source of joy because the real bliss is to be with the Lord... When the Lord is among His people they enjoy His love, company, parenthood and kindness... **For that reason do not ask for Paradise but ask for the Lord Himself...**

Wish to be with Him; to enjoy looking at His joyful face. Truly, David said: "*Your face, Lord, will I seek; hide not Your face far from me.*"...

The most wonderful thing about the story of the thief is that he has been pledged to be with the Lord in Paradise though he was not with the Lord on earth...

Only a few hours spent with the Lord were adequate to offer him the company of the Lord forever. The fact is that

these few hours were spent in depth and touched in depth the heart of the Lord.

Thus, it does not really matter how long you pray and supplicate to the Lord. The question is how deep are your feelings. A deeply felt word could be extremely effective... Say it and live in depth with the Lord to touch His deepest thoughts...

